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N. Africa Specialist Identified As Refusing Polygraph Exam

Former Security Council Aide Calls Test Unreliable

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

The National Security Council staff officer who refused to take a polygraph test about the disclosure of the Reagan administration's secret deception campaign against Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi was identified yesterday as Elaine L. Morton, an expert on Libya and North Africa.

She said in an interview last night that she refused to submit to the FBI polygraph examination as a matter of principle. She denied having been the source of stories about the controversial White House plan, which was first disclosed in The Washington Post Oct. 2.

Morton, who has been transferred back to the State Department because of her stand, was first identified on ABC-TV's "World News Tonight" yesterday. She told an ABC correspondent that she regarded the polygraph "as about as useful as a divining rod in telling if you were a witch in Salem."

An NSC staff officer for the past 14 months, Morton said she was first questioned by FBI agents investigating the news leaks on the afternoon of Oct. 2, the day that The Post's first story by staff writer Bob Woodward appeared under the headline, "Gadhafi Target of Secret U.S. Deception Plan." It said the plan had been outlined in a three-page memo that John M. Poin-dexter, the White House national security affairs adviser, had sent to President Reagan in August.

According to Morton, the Federal Bureau of Investigation questioned her again on Sunday, Oct. 5, after The Post's publication of a more extensive story, which cited a State Department working paper that had been used in drawing up the plan. The working paper, the newspaper reported, advocated a strategy that could lead to "a coup or assassination attempt" against Gadhafi by his own military or other opponents.

At the second visit, Morton said, FBI agents also searched her Maryland apartment, with her consent.

"I assume they were looking for classified papers," she said. She indicated that they found none. She said she was not in the habit of taking such materials home with her, even to work on.

Morton, who said she has hired an attorney, said she was reluctant to go into too many details in light of the FBI's ongoing investigation. She said she assumes that she was one of those chosen for lengthy questioning because "I was closely involved in all the decision-making" concerning Libya.

She said she agreed to FBI questioning for what "felt like five hours" and consented to the search, but balked at the polygraph test because "I just don't believe in them. I've never believed in them. I think it's almost an invasion of a person's physical integrity."

Besides, she said, "I don't think they're reliable. It's foolish for anybody to take this test to prove their innocence."

Morton began her government career at the State Department in October 1974, during the Ford administration, and spent seven years on the policy planning staff at State before joining the NSC. She was assigned to the NSC's crisis management center as a policy analyst and was promoted last July to become the regular NSC staff officer with responsibilities for Libya and North Africa.

White House officials said she offered to return to the State Department in light of the impasse over the polygraph test, and her offer was accepted because NSC officials had "lost trust and confidence" in her.

At the State Department, where Secretary George P. Shultz once threatened to resign rather than be required to take a polygraph exam, officials say she will be accorded all rights of "due process."